



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending January 10, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

NEW CONGRESS CONVENES; ECONOMY IS TOP PRIORITY

This week the first session of the 108th Congress convened. Growing our economy and enhancing national security will be my top priorities this Congress.

One of our first orders of business will be to finish the Fiscal Year 2003 spending bills that went uncompleted at the end of last year. I expect Congress will finish these by the end of January.

To keep our economy growing, I believe we must take steps to foster spending and investment by Americans. This week, the President released a plan to reinvigorate the national economy. The President's proposal to improve growth includes:

- Tax relief for every American who pays taxes
- Incentives for investors and small businesses to keep investing
- Opportunities to help people find jobs

Congress has already acted this year to help unemployed workers by extending unemployment compensation to those who are still looking for a job, particularly in states with a high unemployment rate like Washington.

Other Republican priorities for this Congress include:

- Crafting a budget that funds national defense, homeland security, health care, education and other national needs with fiscal restraint.
- Providing voluntary prescription drug coverage to America's seniors through Medicare.
- Monitoring success of the education bill passed last year, No Child Left Behind and find new ways to help teachers teach and students learn.
- Passing a balanced, comprehensive energy plan that meets our energy needs, decreases our dependence on foreign oil, and promotes conservation measures.

- Making permanent the tax relief passed in 2001 that includes rate reductions for all taxpayers, expansion of the adoption and child credit, repeal of the marriage penalty, and measures to improve retirement security.

TOP BUSH FORESTRY OFFICIAL TO ATTEND REPUBLIC TOWN HALL MEETING

Mark Rey, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has accepted my invitation to attend a town hall meeting in Republic on Jan. 18. I am convening the meeting with the people of Ferry County to discuss solutions to keep forestry jobs alive, and reverse Clinton Administration policies that led to the decline of active forest management. Recently Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc. announced it will close its Republic mill adjacent to the Colville National Forest. The closure will leave 87 workers without jobs in the town of 1,000. Vaagen Brothers Lumber is the last large-scale employer in Republic, the county seat. U.S. policies make it increasingly difficult to get timber supply from national forests and compete with Canadian imports.

Northwest communities have made a living off the land for over a century. I believe we can balance healthy forests and natural resource jobs, but right now the scales are so tipped that the jobs are falling off the scale. Under Secretary Rey has years of expertise in forest management policy. I believe he will hear the plight of the people of Ferry County, and I plan to work with the Administration to save these jobs and the communities impacted by this problem.

The meeting will take place Saturday, Jan. 18 from 10-11:30 a.m., at Republic Elementary School Gymnasium, 915 E. Hwy 20.

LEGISLATION

This week I became an original cosponsor of Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act (REPaIR), introduced by Rep. Doug Bereuter of Nebraska.

This legislation would help ensure Washington state Medicare patients outside of King County can continue seeing their doctors.

The Rural Equity Payment Index Reform Act (REPaIR) would lessen the disparity that currently exists between urban and less-populated areas. Currently, King County physicians are reimbursed at a higher rate than every other county in the state.

Doctors in Eastern Washington have been turning away Medicare patients because they cannot afford to treat them. This is unacceptable. By fixing this payment problem, patients can continue to see their normal doctor, and doctors can keep their practices solvent.

The measure would gradually phase in a higher minimum rate of reimbursement for rural and smaller urban providers without lowering the reimbursement in large urban areas. The result could be as much as a \$4.9 million annual increase in Medicare payments to Washington physicians outside of King County.

In a time when many physicians are leaving Washington state, we need incentives to keep doctors here. Improving the reimbursement rate can help us retain quality health care providers, and will give our seniors peace of mind that they can continue to see their doctors.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

The first session of the 108th Congress convened on Tuesday.

S. 23. This bill provides a 5-month extension of unemployment compensation for those still looking for work, particularly residents of states with high unemployment rates, like Washington. The bill passed by a vote of 416-4.

I, along with other members of our state's congressional delegation, lobbied congressional leaders and President Bush to enact this relief as soon as possible. President Bush signed this bill into law this week.

H.J.Res. 1. This measure will continue government funding until the end of January. I expect Congress will finish the remaining FY 2003 spending bills by the end of this month so we can focus on the coming year's work. The measure passed on a voice vote.

While I formally expressed support for these measures, I missed both votes due to a death in my family.

SCHEDULE

This week I was sworn in as a member of the 108th Congress. I met with Thedford Collins with Weyerhaeuser to discuss issues related to softwood lumber. I also met with the Ambassador of Singapore, Heng Chee Chen, to discuss opportunities to increase bilateral trade with the country. I met with representatives of the Indian Health Service to discuss diabetes funding. I met with representatives of the Boys and Girls Club to discuss initiatives to promote physical activities.

Next week I will be in Spokane, Colville and Ferry County. I look forward to seeing many of you while I am there.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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